

for the miser, of course; he was far too unpopular a character to waste sympathy upon; and, besides, his fury and bad language were such as to put aside any feelings but those of ridicule.

"Come, stop that drivelling and screaming," said Henderson severely, "and let's hear quietly what you have to say."

Billy Jones was pale, and evidently concerned to find that another theft had been perpetrated. "What is it, Cadley?" he said. "Have you lost money, or what's the matter? Compose yourself and tell us."

The miser threw down his empty box upon the prefect's table, where it fell with a clatter, lid down; Cadley picked it up again, and it was observed that no coin fell out. "There!" he cried, "look at it—empty, and there was nearly five pounds in it last night; I had collected it to—to buy a present for my mother" (a shout of derision here suddenly arose from the small boys at the end of the table, but was quickly suppressed), "and—and oh! I wish I had hold of the fellow who's got my money, I don't care who he is!" The poor miser ended his statement by bursting into a flood of passionate tears, and hugging the money-box to his heart in a manner which would have been supremely ridiculous if it had not been also very tragic.

"Come, now, no foolery, please," said Harrington; "where was this money?"

"In my locker in the passage!" blubbered Cadley.

"Was it locked?"

"Yes, I should just think it was," said the miser; "you don't suppose I'd leave it unlocked, with a beastly thief in the house?"

"Come, Cadley," said Billy Jones, "be a man, and help us to find the thief. Are you perfectly certain the locker and the box were both locked? Where are the keys?" Cadley looked confused.

"That's the rum part of it," he said; "here's the key of the tin box, but the locker was open, and I can't find the key of it."

"Oh, well," said Henderson, "if you leave your locker open, my good chap, you may expect to be robbed!"

"But I didn't!" cried Cadley, almost shrieking, "the thing was locked; I'm positive of that."

"Then where's the key?" asked Billy.

"Stolen by the beast who took the money," said Cadley, growing frantic again; "and if you prefects want to hush it up, as you did Attley's loss, all I can say is, you're not going to be allowed to league with my robber as you did with his; so you'll just make a row about it and tell Rhodes, or I shall!"

Of course, there was nothing to be done but to kick Cadley for his impertinence (a duty which was freely performed by Henderson and Harrington, though Billy Jones was more mercifully inclined), and to go straight to Mr. Rhodes, and tell him all about both thefts.

Never had any of us beheld the countenance of dear old Rhodes so black and careworn as it appeared that day at dinner, after the communication had been made to him. He ate nothing, and, to all that was said to him, he answered in monosyllables, or not at all. Truly and indeed he was the picture of a despondent housemaster; and no wonder! for we did pride ourselves at Rhodes' upon being, at least, an honest community; and I know Rhodes himself thought more about straightforwardness, and matters of that kind,

than of pre-eminence in school-work, or even proficiency in games and athletics.

After dinner Mr. Rhodes made us a little speech, and contrived in a few words to make us realise to the full how horrible and shameful a thing had befallen us, in that one of our number had proved himself a thief. The blow was terrible to him, he said (he need not have told us this, for the poor old fellow's voice was shaky with grief as he spoke), and there were tears rolling slowly down his cheeks), and he hoped we all felt the horror and degradation of it. It must be our duty, he said, to discover the mean and unworthy and wicked person who was guilty of this thing.

We did keep our eyes open: we even went so far as to form a sort of vigilance committee, each member of which hung about the hall and passages for a certain period of time every day, in order to keep a watch upon the lockers and play-boxes.

But in spite of our care, and to our utter dismay and disappointment, a third robbery was successfully perpetrated within a very few days, that is, within a week, of the first. Young Attley had received the birthday tip he expected—two pounds ten. He had cashed the postal orders, and put away the money in the usual receptacle for his wealth; yet, when he went to his box, on the following day, the purse was empty, just as on the former occasion, though the box itself was locked exactly as he had left it.

I was a member of the vigilance committee, and was present at the meeting when notes were compared and the matter thoroughly discussed and investigated. I could swear that no thief had been near the play-boxes or lockers during my term of sentry-go, for I had kept them in view all the time; and, since it was football afternoon, not a soul had come about the place. The rest were just as positive, and I remember Billy Jones raised a laugh by declaring that it so happened he had sat on Alice's box all the while he had been on duty, so that the thief must have been clever to remove first him and then the cash without revealing the circumstance. The thing was a mystery.

Then we agreed that the proper course to pursue would be to put marked coins in the boxes, and watch again, and at the same time to spread a rumour that such and such persons had received sums of money, and were anxious as to the safety of the same.

This was done; but, though we waited and watched very carefully, we surprised no thief, and, indeed, the marked coins remained unappropriated, though a sum of two pounds, belonging to one of the bigger boys, and unmarked, was removed as mysteriously as the sums already appropriated.

After this last disaster, Mr. Rhodes engaged a detective; but, though this gentleman watched and dogged pretty nearly every boy in the house, unknown to the fellows, he obtained no clue of any kind, and was obliged, after a week or so of futile labour, to give up the task as useless.

"They're all up to it now," he said, "it ain't likely that the thief would try any of his games on with me about; you make the boys their own detectives, sir, and you'll get him in time."

Then the vigilance committee was disbanded, and every member of it instructed to keep a watch on his own account and according to his discretion.

A few days after this I received a very great surprise. I was playing in a pick-up football match, and